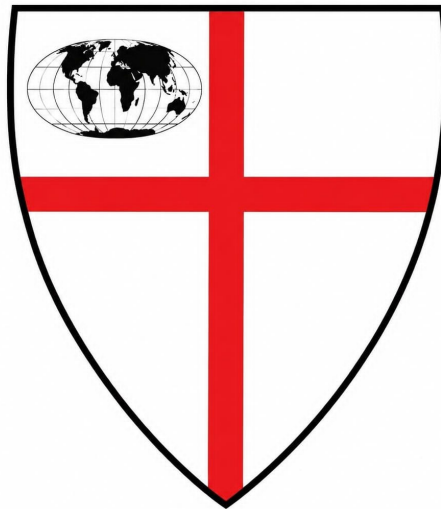


“Abide in My Love” (John 15:9): Instruments of His Peace

Anglican Church International



By

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ABSTRACT

This reflection on the Gospel appointed for Proper 15, Year A (Track 2), reads the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28) through the lens of Paul's declaration that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29), arguing that the unconditional love of God in Christ is extended to the whole of creation and is received by faith rather than by inherited standing. Beginning candidly from the author's own frustration and self-preoccupation, the reflection traces a movement from concern for self to concern for the other, and proposes that this reorientation—enacted, not merely felt—is the means by which the soul is healed. The persistence of the outsider woman becomes a paradigm of the faith that crosses the boundary between insider and outsider, and the argument is pressed to its hardest case: the love owed even to those consumed by hatred, violence, and racism. Drawing on the received scholarly reading of the pericope in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, the enemy-love commands of the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:27–36; Matthew 5:38–48), and the Johannine summons to abide in love (John 15:9–13; 13:34–35; 1:4–5), the author frames discipleship as becoming, for one another and for all creation, an instrument of God's peace. It closes with the Prayer of Saint Francis and the Collect appointed for Proper 15, asking that we sow love where there is hatred and be made instruments of His peace.

Abstract by

Claude (Anthropic)

in conversation with The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland

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Abide in my Love (John 15:9): Instruments of His Peace

Saint Paul tells us today the “gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” This has been a running theme over the last few Sundays. Do you believe it? If so, what, then, is it you believe? What are the gifts of God and what is He calling us – you - to do? What must we have to answer His call? And for that matter, what does any of this have to do with what I - we - do when we – I - leave here today?

As I was writing this I was frustrated. I did not believe I was able to write anything worth saying about our readings for today let alone in some way showing how we can apply what is being said to our live today. What am I doing? I need time to myself. I don't need to be writing a sermon. Not as many members of St. Clare's had been coming for church before COVID-19. It is my fault! No, can't they see what I do for them! I am tired, as seems obvious. I need a vacation! I, I, I, Me , ME, ME! I WANT! I NEED!!!!!!!!!!!!!! **WHAT I LEAST NEED IS HAVING TO WRITE A SERMON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Then I remembered a time when a friend in need called and I was drawn out of concern for my shortcomings, my desires and frustrations, to focusing on helping another and God did for me what at that moment I could not, or at least was not doing for myself. Through my friend He reminded me of my mission, our mission, the mission of the church, to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to all we encounter. This entails concern for others, not self, first, faith in God in Christ that our needs through Him by means of ourselves and others will be met. He is always there and His gifts and His call are irrevocable, says Saint Paul. And we are able to see the Truth before our eyes, the eyes of our soul if only we will get out of our *selves* out of the way so to speak.

Last week we encountered what happens when we lose faith by turning our concern to ourselves. Like Peter we begin to sink. Attempting to save ourselves leads to our demise whereas concern for others leads to our healing. At times we are called to get out of the safety of the boat to help others and in the face of what seems to be our demise in stormy seas – the stormy seas of hatred, violence, and racism, for example - and we lose faith in God in Christ to ensure our well being. We turn to concern for ourselves – perhaps wanting to do violence ourselves as hatred raises its ugly head in us - and thereby lose sight of Christ abiding in our lives, feeling His presence. Yet, as noted in last weeks' sermon, as we begin to go under so to speak, believe death is at hand (which it can be and often is), that we can do nothing to stop it and are finally motivated to ask God for help – help on which, notably, we are always dependent – and by faith ask, He is there and HE answers. He answers us both personally – in prayer for example – and through others who, by faith come to our aid. In so doing we see and feel Christ, see and feel His unconditional love and compassion for us working through others to heal us. And when others call out and we, by faith, answer – which is to say, answer Christ's call – we begin again to see and feel Him, see and feel His unconditional love and compassion for us in our lives through our action, our action grounded in faith in Him. In so doing we see and feel Christ working through us to heal others; and, by His grace, He heals our souls. And this is, in part what today's Gospel points out, our need for faith in Him, and what follows from that faith.

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting,

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:22–28, NRSV)

Here it is worth noting that woman is a Cananite, a gentile, not of the House of Israel. What are we to make of this aspect of the Gospel? Three times Jesus rebukes her. First he says nothing. She asks a second time and He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She employs Him again and he answers, "It is not fair to take the children's food, (i.e., what He has to offer Israel), and throw it to the dogs (i.e., the Gentiles)." Wow! What to make of that? Finally, she replies again, and here is something different. She says "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." According to the Oxford Bible Commentary, "This recognizes Israel's privileges yet simultaneously implies that others can be benefited" (Barton and Muddiman 864). Here something has happened that manifests her faith in Him for Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Again, what are we to make of this? I think it has to do with those to whom the Word is meant, namely, all of God's creation. According to the Oxford Bible Commentary, there are common themes between the above passage and Matthew 8:5-13, "... , above all the theme that salvation comes to those outside Israel in response to their faith in Jesus" (Barton and Muddiman 864). The gifts and calling of God in Christ are for everyone and for everyone irrevocable, everyone, that is, who by **faith** turns and follows Christ. God's unconditional love through Christ extends to all His creation, including those consumed by hate and violence, such as neo-Nazis, white supremacists, racists, or one religious group's hatred of another, such as Christians hating Muslims, Muslims hating Christians and burning down their churches in Pakistan which has been taking place recently, Christians hating Hindus and Hindus hating Christians, etc. No one is to be turned away. And this means we are not turned away either too. Thank God Almighty!!!

Yet we can turn away from Christ:

- We may not approach others or attempt to proclaim the word to others we think for whom the Word is not fit, or we think either will not or cannot benefit, (e.g., people who belong to groups other than our own, people who are not like us, pick any group you want as an example here). Notably this sort of thing often leads to violence such as the ongoing violence of Muslims against Christians in Pakistan.
- Or we don't want to bother with them, they are annoying us as the woman was annoying the Disciples and they let concern for themselves get in the way of answering God in Christ's call. Our judgement gets in the way.

- Or we think ourselves already in that elect class and need not turn to God and ask. Again our judgement gets in the way.
- Or we think ourselves, as did I last night, unable to proclaim the Word, my judgement got in the way, and I closed my eyes from seeing and feeling God in my life. We lose/have not faith and turn from answering His call. Again our selves get in the way.
- Or, we can think, as did I last night, why bother, why should I make an effort to prepare a gift if others refuse to accept it. Again, *our selves can get in the way. Notably, I was reminded recently by helping another person that the Gift given through me is from God and is irrevocable.*

All of the above are ways we can and do turn from answering God's call to us through Christ and all are grounded in **lack of faith**. Whether this lack of faith is manifest as concern for self or judgement of self and/or others it yields our turning away from answering His call and, in so doing, losing sight of and feeling of His presence in our lives; and we, as noted last week, like St. Peter, begin to sink.

But if by faith we turn to God in Christ He will "be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of His countenance and come to us, [and through us make His] ways be known upon earth, [and His] saving help among all nations." He will give us the gift of His Holy Spirit of unconditional love. With His Gift leading us into all Truth we can see that to which God in and through Christ is calling us, namely, to unconditionally love others – even those consumed by hate, violence, and racism such as neo-Nazis, white supremacists, racists, or one religious group's hatred of another, such as Christians hating Muslims, Muslims hating Christians, Christians hating Hindus and Hindus hating Christians, etc. – as God in Christ unconditionally loves us and all His creation. Jesus tells us in John's Gospel chapter 15 verses 9-13:

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:9–13, NRSV)

And Jesus goes on to tell us John 13:34-35:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35, NRSV)

How are we to respond to hatred, violence, and racism? With hatred? No! How are we to answer? With violence? No! what, then, is the answer? God in Christ tells us the answer and it is love! Love is the answer!!! We find in the Gospel of Matthew, namely, Matthew 5: 38-48:

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴² Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,^[o] what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38–48, NRSV)

And in the Gospel of Luke, namely, Luke 6:27-36:

²⁷ But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[e] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27–36, NRSV)

Love is the answer!!! When we unconditionally love others – including and especially those lost in hatred, violence, and racism – we make known to them God’s gift given us in and through Christ of His Holy Spirit of unconditional love, and thus, that to which God is calling them too. And in our unconditionally loving others we proclaim that God’s gift and calling are irrevocable. In so doing, in our so following His Holy Spirit of unconditional love where it leads us by faith - sowing love where there is hatred, forgiveness where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness; and seeking to console rather than being consoled, understand rather than being understood, and love rather than being loved - we are for each other and all His creation, instruments of His Peace. If we so answer His call, then by His Grace, our souls are healed and we live. For as Saint Francis goes on to tell us, it is in giving that we receive, pardoning that we are pardoned and dying that we are born to eternal life.

Further, by faith we know we shall overcome hatred, violence, and racism. For our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ was then, and is through His dwelling in us now the incarnation of God's Holy Spirit of unconditional love for us and all His creation. As such He is the life and light in our world. And as Saint John tells us in chapter one verses 4 and 5 of his Gospel, “⁴ in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4–5, NRSV)

Let us, then, pray together to God that we might so answer:

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life and make us instruments of your peace:

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light; and
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

*For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

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